

file Argentina R

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Before dawn on April 15, 1977, a group of armed men, wearing civilian clothes but identifying themselves as officers of the First Army Corps, which has jurisdiction over Buenos Aires province, came to the home of Jacobo Timerman, the editor of the liberal daily La Opinión, and dragged him away. The same scene was enacted at the home of Enrique Jara, the paper's assistant editor. Both men were told to take along warm clothing and cigarettes, since they might be away from home for some time. Later in the day, they were reported under arrest.

Timerman is a widely respected figure. His paper had been strongly critical of Isabel Perón's government, but more recently had been criticized from within the military for its liberalism and its emphatic pro-Israel stance. It repeatedly tangled with the junta's censors and was closed down twice.

The authorities initially declined to comment, but informed sources thought Timerman and Jara might have been arrested in connection with a financial scandal--a Government investigation into the affairs of a banker, David Graiver, who had been killed in a plane crash on August 7, 1976. The First Army Corps reportedly believed that Graiver had served as banker, investment broker and general financial front man for the Montoneros, a notorious terrorist group which had obtained large amounts of money through kidnappings. Sources at La Opinión stated that Graiver had been one of Timerman's chief financial backers when the paper was started in 1971, and that Timerman had often visited him in New York.

On April 17, following demands by the Argentine Newspaper Publishers Association and the arrested men's families, the Army announced that it was indeed holding Timerman in connection with the Graiver probe--not, it was stressed, for journalistic or religious reasons. (Timerman is a Jew, as was Graiver.) La Opinión, which continued to publish, disclaimed any involvement with the "Graiver affair." Visits to Timerman by his family were prevented by the police.

As for Jara, he was at first listed as "missing"; his detention was not acknowledged until April 19, and then no reason was offered. Nor was any information given concerning the whereabouts of Enrique Rahb, a staff member of La Opinión, who had been seized on April 16.

Other newspapermen also suffered arrest, kidnapping, disappearance or injuries about this time. Some of these criminal acts were thought to be the work of paramilitary forces acting with the knowledge of certain military leaders. A reporter for La Opinión said: "It is now becoming difficult to be honest to one's self as a newspaperman without incurring the threat of bodily harm either from the military, the police, or other groups."

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In mid-May, Timerman was reported to be held on executive order without official charges, and by late June, 20 persons besides him were awaiting trial by court martial in the Graiver investigation. Early in July, a special court martial convened to determine whether Timerman and the other persons arrested in the probe, by then numbering 29, were to be tried on charges of subversion by a military court, or turned over to civil courts on charges yet to be specified.

Timerman was eventually cleared by a military tribunal of involvement in subversive activities. Nevertheless, he remained in an army prison, without charge, while being investigated for "economic subversion" in connection with business operations allegedly involving the Montoneros. Meanwhile, at least two other journalists remained missing. Their disappearances, and other similar cases, were attributed by informed observers to rightist factions within the Government.

Timerman was never formally charged with any crime in the investigation of alleged links between his newspaper and Graiver. Yet on November 10, the junta announced that he had been relieved of his civil rights and control over his assets, and that he could be held indefinitely. The decree was signed by President Jorge Rafael Videla and the other two members of the junta. It was thought to indicate that the junta was trying to satisfy internal military pressure but did not have a case against Timerman that could be made in court. A Government official was quoted as saying: "There is a conviction in the military that there is a connection between Timerman and Graiver, and that makes him a subversive."

Some of the measures taken against Timerman were the same as had been used earlier against ex-President Isabel de Perón and high-ranking members of the Peronist government: He was deprived of the right to vote or to be elected to office, to be a union representative, or to exercise a profession requiring official certification. But in addition, his newspaper was placed in the custody of the state, to be published under a Government-appointed director until Timerman could prove that it was his "legitimate property." (A source close to President Videla subsequently said Timerman was held for printing "bad ideas," an apparent reference to La Opinión's coverage of liberal, and occasionally leftist, activities.) Pursuant to the decree, Timerman remained, and still remains, in detention at "the disposition of the executive power."

From its beginnings, the Timerman case deeply disturbed the Argentine Jewish community, already alarmed over the "Graiver affair," about the investigation of José Gelbard, also a Jew, who had served as Minister of Economy under President Perón in 1973-74, and about anti-Semitic actions by members of the security forces which the Government had been unable to prevent. Indications are that certain members of security forces believe Jews to have been deeply involved in left-wing guerrilla activities. (There reportedly were some 600 Jews among the 8,000 persons who

the military said had been killed, arrested or kidnapped since it took over in March 1976.)

Early in May, Dr. Nehemias Resnizky, president of DAIA, the central representative body of Argentine Jewry, said he had been assured by Roberto Viola, head of the Army's general staff, that the Graiver investigation was not an anti-Semitic act; but he noted that it was nevertheless being exploited by anti-Semites. In June, right-wing nationalist publications were still having a field day with anti-Semitic charges apropos of the probe. The Government did little to curb this propaganda, except that the Ministry of the Interior banned the worst offender, a biweekly called Cabildo, for two months.

After the November decree, an unidentified Jewish leader asked: "Would this have happened if Timerman were not a Jew?" Today, misgivings persist despite the ready access which Jewish leaders have to high officials, and despite the Government's repeated denials of anti-Semitism.

The concern of Argentine Jews over the Timerman case was conveyed some time ago to the U.S. Government. Criticism also came from many human rights groups and American Jewish organizations. President Carter raised the matter with President Videla when the latter visited Washington in August, as did Mr. Carter's human rights coordinator, Patricia Derian, during a visit to Argentina the same month. More recently, it was expected that Secretary of State Vance would reiterate U.S. concern about a fair trial for Timerman during a visit to Argentina on November 21.